

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PFOR, NU

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES WITH
SOMOZA

REF: STATE 162407

1. AT MY REQUEST, I MET WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA IN HIS OFFICE ON THE AFTERNOON OF JULY 21. HE IS JUST RECOVERING FROM WHAT HE INDICATED WAS A TWO-WEEK BOUT OF GASTRO-INTESTINAL PROBLEMS. HE LOOKED THINNER AND SOMEWHAT SUBDUED. THE DISCUSSION LASTED AN HOUR AND A HALF.

2. I BEGAN BY EXPRESSING OUR CONCERN OVER THE INCREASING NUMBER OF ALLEGATIONS OF NATIONAL GUARD ABUSES OF HUMAN RIGHTS BROUGHT TO THE EMBASSY'S ATTENTION IN RECENT MONTHS. I MENTIONED THE BISHOP OF ZELAYA'S PASTORAL LETTER OF MAY 20, REPORTS WE HAD RECEIVED FROM PRIESTS AND OTHERS, AND THE LETTER OF THE CAPUCHINS

OF JUNE 13. I TOLD PRESIDENT SOMOZA THAT WE RECOGNIZED THAT SOME CHARGES OF ABUSES WERE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED AND THEREFORE SUSPECT. HOWEVER, EVIDENCE CONCERNING NATIONAL GUARD MISCONDUCT WAS MOUNTING. NOT ALL OF THE CHARGES COULD BE EASILY DISMISSED AS POLITICALLY-INSPIRED. I MENTIONED THE SINCERE CONCERN OF MODERATE CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND OTHERS, ABOUT THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PARISHIONERS AND FRIENDS.

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3. I EXPLAINED TO SOMOZA THAT THE PERSISTENCE OF ALLEGATIONS OF SERIOUS ABUSES RAN THE RISK OF STRAINING OUR FRIENDLY AND CORDIAL BILATERAL RELATIONS, INCLUDING OUR ECONOMIC AND MILITARY COOPERATION. I EMPHASIZED THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S LEGITIMATE RIGHT TO COMBAT LOCAL TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE WAS NOT BEING

QUESTION.

HOWEVER, TERRORIZING, TORTURING OR KILLING SUSPECTED COLLABORATORS OF THE FSLN DETAINED BY THE NATIONAL GUARD WAS REPUGNANT TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, TO OUR GOVERNMENT, AND TO ME PERSONALLY. WE DEPLORED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BECAUSE IT RUNS COUNTER TO OUR CONVICTION THAT GOVERNMENTS DRAW THEIR LEGITIMACY FROM THEIR RESPECT FOR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND HUMAN DIGNITY.

4. THE DOCTRINE OF NON-INTERVENTION, WHICH IS STRONGLY SUPPORTED BY OUR GOVERNMENT AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, DOES NOT PRECLUDE OUR EXPRESSING OUR VIEWS ABOUT MATTERS THAT WE CONSIDER OF VITAL IMPORTANCE. HUMAN RIGHTS IS SUCH AN ISSUE. WE DO NOT PRETEND TO IMPOSE OUR STANDARDS ON OTHERS. HOWEVER, THE POLICY OF NON-INTERVENTION DOES NOT IMPLY APPROVAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES ANYWHERE.

5. I MADE CLEAR TO SOMOZA THAT THE MAINTENANCE OF OUR TRADITIONAL CORDIAL RELATIONS REQUIRED THAT THE GON BE MORE FORTHCOMING WITH INFORMATION CONCERNING PERSONS ALLEGED TO HAVE BEEN TORTURED OR KILLED BY THE NATIONAL GUARD, OR WHOSE FATE AFTER DETENTION IS UNKNOWN. IT WOULD BE INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT FOR US TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY AND FRANKLY WITH RISING CRITICISM OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE GON UNLESS WE WERE BETTER INFORMED. MORE COMPLETE INFORMATION ALSO WAS NEEDED CONCERNING THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE GUERRILLA PROBLEM IN THE NORTH, INCLUDING FSLN CLASHES WITH THE NATIONAL GUARD.

8. I REFERRED TO THE PRESIDENT'S OWN COMMITMENT TO AVOIDING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES. I ADDED THAT WE WERE AWARE THAT HE HAD INSTRUCTED THE NATIONAL GUARD ON SEVERAL RECENT OCCASIONS TO ACT WITH RESTRAINT. FROM THE EVIDENCE, HIS ADMONITIONS WERE NOT BEING HEEDED. IT APPEARED THAT STRICTER CONTROL OVER NATIONAL GUARD TREATMENT OF PERSONS DETAINED IN COUNTER-INSURGENCY

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OPERATIONS WAS CALLED FOR. I ALSO SUGGESTED TO PRESIDENT SOMOZA THAT IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO ESTABLISH AN INFORMAL CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE EMBASSY AND SOMEONE IN THE NATIONAL GUARD SPECIFICALLY ASSIGNED TO PROVIDE US WITH AVAILABLE INFORMATION AND ANSWER QUESTIONS WE MIGHT HAVE.

7. SOMOZA REPLIED BY SAYING THAT HE WAS IN COMPLETE AGREEMENT THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES COULD NOT BE TOLERATED. HE RE-

PEATED HIS WELL-KNOWN VIEW THAT HE CONSIDERED SUCH ABUSES AS COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. HE SAID THAT HE HAD A MEETING THIS MORN- IUNG WITH THE DEPARTMENTAL COMMANDERS OF THE NATIONAL GUARD DURING WHICH HE WARNED THEM AGAINST MISTREATMENT OF DETAINED PERSONS FOR ANY REASON. HE TOLD THE OFFICERS THAT DETAINEES MUST BE INTERROGATED AND PROCESSED UNDER MARTIAL LAW. THE GUILTY WILL BE PUNISHED ACCORDING TO THE LAW, AND THE INNOCENT WILL BE RELEASED. THAT WAS HIS GOVERNMENT'S POLICY.

8. HE ADDED THAT THE USG MUIZ REJTIZE THAT THE GON FACED A LONG GUERRILLA STRUGGLE SUPPORTED FROM CUBA, AND CONSTANT ATTACK OVERSEAS INSPIRED BY OPPOSITION ELEMENTS, INCLUDING SOME PRIESTS. HE SAID THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, OR PARTS OF IT, WAS "UP TO ITS EARS IN POLITICS". HE CLAIMED TO HAVE PROOF THAT A NICARAGUAN PRIEST HAD PROVIDED JACK ANDERSON WITH MATERIAL TO BE USED AGAINST HIM AND HIS GOVERNMENT. HE FACED A WAR ON TWO FRONTS: AT HOME AGAINST THE FSLN TERRORISTS AND ABROAD AGAINST THOSE WHO HOPED TO BE ABLE TO EXPLOIT THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE AGAINST THE NICARAGUAN GOVERNMENT.

9. WHAT DISTURBED HIM MOST, HE SAID, WAS THE POLITICAL MANIPULA- TION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE IN THE UNITED STATES, BY THE U.S. CONGRESS AND MEDIA. HE UNDERSTOOD THE PRESSURE BEING BROUGHT TO BEAR ON THE STATE DEPARTMENT. HE ADDED THAT THE DEPARTMENT WAS BECOMING A POLICEMAN ON HUMAN RIGHTS. YOU ARE BECOMING AN INVESTIGATIVE AGENCY FOR THE CONGRESS, AND A POLICEMAN WHO TELLS ITS FRIENDS HOW TO MANAGE THEIR INTERNAL AFFAIRS. IF THIS CONTINUES, THE UNITED STATES WILL HAVE FEW FRIENDS LEFT ANYWHERE.

10. I REPLIED THAT WE DID NOT SEE IT THAT WAY. IT WAS OUR DUTY TO MAKE OUR POSITION PERFECTLY CLEAR. IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT THE GON HAD A CLEAR GRASP OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF PERSISTENT CHARGES, WHATEVER THEIR OBJECTIVE VALIDITY, OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY THE CONFIDENTIAL

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NATIONAL GUARD. THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF THESE ALLEGATIONS COULD ONLY BE UNFAVORABLE FOR THE CONTINUATION OF OUR GOOD RELA- TIONS.

11. IN CONCLUSION, PRESIDENT SOMOZA AGREED WITH THE DESIRABILITY OF SUPPLYING THE EMBASSY WITH AVAILABLE INFORMATION CONCERNING SERIOUS ABUSES AS WELL AS NATIONAL GUARD CONTACT WITH THE FSLN. HE WOULD IMMEDIATELY APPOINT GENERAL REYNALDO PEREZ VEGA, G-1, TO ACT AS A CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE EMBASSY. HE ASKED FOR THE NAME OF THE EMBASSY OFFICER WHO WOULD SERVE AS OUR POINT OF CONTACT, AND WROTE IT DOWN.

12. THE DISCUSSION WAS CORDIAL THROUGHOUT. PRESIDENT SOMOZA SEEMED TO HAVE UNDERSTOOD OUR POSITION COMPLETELY, AND SHOWED A WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE. THE NEW EMBASSY POLITICAL

OFFICER WILL BE ASSIGNED THE LIAISON ROLE WITH THE G-1, WHO IS
WELL-INFORMED AND CLOSE TO SOMOZA, AND THE SITUATION WILL CON-
TINUE TO BE OBSERVED CLOSELY. THEBERGE

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